



Royal Irish Academy Grants Report

Title:	Dr.
First Name:	Ailise
Surname:	Bulfin
Discipline:	Humanities and Social Sciences
Year of Award:	2018
Project Title	Cultural representations of child sexual abuse: the myths and the fears

1. Research background:

Dr. Ailise Bulfin is a literary and cultural scholar whose research ranges from nineteenth-century to contemporary literature and explores the dark side of the human imagination, with a particular focus on representations of catastrophe, war and trauma. She has published a number of critical essays on topics such as gothic fiction, xenophobia, invasion scares, natural catastrophe and climate change, and her monograph, entitled *Gothic Invasions: Imperialism, War and Fin- de-Siècle Popular Fiction*, came out in April 2018. She currently works as a medical humanities Research Fellow in the School of Medicine at Trinity College Dublin, focusing on representations of child sexual abuse in nineteenth-century and contemporary culture. She also lectures in Victorian and Modern Literature in the School of English, Drama and Film at University College Dublin. Her work has been funded by the Irish Research Council, Royal Irish Academy and the Trinity Wellcome Trust ISSF.

2. Please outline the findings of your research and/or milestones achieved (did you achieve the primary objectives - if not, what did you learn from the process)?

In both cases I achieved the primary objectives and my research has been greatly enhanced by the activities the award allowed me to undertake.

Objective 1: The archival research has been very productive, allowing me to get a much more precise sense of how the issue of CSA was framed. My findings show that Krafft-Ebing clearly conceived of CSA as a separate issue from other forms of sexual 'perversion' (as he would have termed it) from an early stage, and that while Ellis did not consider it to be so, his writings on the need for the legal protection of boys from homosexual relations with adult men indirectly shaped how CSA was conceived of. Both sets of writings also disclosed tendencies to adopt gothic language when describing extreme sexual crime, and in particular to gothicise the perpetrator, overlapping with the more sensationalist discourses of journalism and popular fiction. I have subsequently completed the envisaged article (see Dissemination), with a considerably enlarged section on sexology.

Objective 2: The award facilitated an extremely productive research planning meeting with Professor Roger Luckhurst in support of my Wellcome Research Fellowship in Humanities and Social Science application. His advice on my preliminary and full application drafts was invaluable, helping me to frame them appropriately for the scheme and offering me facilities at Birkbeck to carry out some proposed public engagement work. The application has successfully passed the preliminary and full stages, and I have been invited to interview at Wellcome on 23rd January 2019.

